

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Swift Parrot Survey, 5/8/00

Unlike the May survey we had a very pleasant, mainly sunny day this time. Five people, Chris Morris, Ern Perkins, Margaret Badminton, Maggie Oliver and Rita Mills, met at 27 Doveton St. for an 8.30 start, and we decided to work together. We had several stops, Gower School where there were numerous Red Wattlebirds and Fuscous Honeyeaters, the Quince Tree where we saw Swift Parrots and lots of lorikeets, about a kilometre before the Red, White and Blue, the Red, White and Blue itself which was very quiet - despite a number of Red Ironbarks in flower (and by the smell of honey they weren't lacking in nectar), at a paddock corner in Golf Links Road, and two stops on Mia Mia Road.

We also stopped in Newstead, and I can still recommend the "Bee-stings" from the bakery!

We returned to the Red, White and Blue, where we found Ken and Maureen Dredge having their lunch, and later George and Phee Broadway joined us - but still no more Swift Parrots.

Four of us continued on to the big dam, while Maureen and Ken headed home via Golf Links road, and George and Phee headed off to check out the Quince Tree. We stopped twice more in Smith's Reef bush, but little more was seen. All the same, we had quite a commendable list of 32 birds for the day.

Yellow Gums and Red Ironbarks were in flower, and we found the Swift Parrots feeding in the Yellow Gums with Purple-crowned Lorikeets. Four were positively identified by sight, and at least two more were heard and identified by their calls.

Birds for the day were - Red Wattlebirds (numerous almost every stop), Fuscous Honeyeaters (also numerous) Magpies, Eastern Rosellas (I saw more than I've seen for quite some time), Crimson Rosellas, Australian Ravens, Little, Musk and Purple-crowned Lorikeets, Swift Parrots, Brown and White-throated Treecreepers, White-plumed Honeyeaters, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Masked Lapwings, Grey Shrike-thrush, Crested Bellbird (heard), Olive-backed Oriole (heard), Superb Fairy-wrens, Galahs, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes,

Buff-rumped Thornbills, Little Pied Cormorant, Swans, Coots, Hoary-headed Grebes, Grey Currawong, Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters (only a couple at the last stop) Scarlet Robin and Jacky Winter.

Rita Mills

Birrindudu Wetlands, East Kimberly

During June we flew to Darwin with two members of our family, and continued on to Katherine by a rented car to rendezvous with our granddaughter (whose wedding we were there to attend about two weeks later). It had been arranged for us to arrive early in order to visit the cattle station of which she is joint manager, and accordingly, she was waiting at Katherine to drive us the 700 km south-west to "Birrindudu" next day.

As we travelled we were agreeably surprised at the beauty and diversity of the countryside - extensive Mitchell-grass plains, lightly forested areas of eucalypts and Leopardwoods, masses of yellow flowering Turpentine Scrub, and areas of *Grevillea wickhamii*, with its blue-grey holly type leaves and striking scarlet blossom. There were several flocks of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos, and many small birds such as honeyeaters which we were travelling too fast to identify.

In the late afternoon as we reached the final 270 km of road (unsealed) we observed a Bustard and her chick on the roadside and reversed for a closer look. She remained unperturbed, while the male kept a wary eye on us from the other side of the track. We saw several small groups in flight as we continued across the Mitchell Grass plain.

After 8 ½ hours of travelling which included the only fuel stops along the way - Top Springs and Kalkaringi (formerly Wave Hill), as well as a picnic lunch at Montijinni Creek, we were glad to arrive at 7.30 pm to a meal of succulent roast chicken and vegetables, done to perfection by the station cook, and placed in the homestead oven.

Next morning I rose with the sun for an early cup of tea on the wide verandah surrounding the homestead, which is situated on a slight rise above a large lagoon about 100 metres distant, a scene of considerable bird activity at this time of day. Birrindudu and Wallmunga stations, along with Nicholson to the north-west on the W.A. border, are administered by two managers based at Birrindudu. The flood plains consist of a fan-like network of "floodout" channels from Sturt Creek, some of which are permanent after the wet season, and the homestead lagoon is one of these. Sturt Creek is nearby at this point. As I watched from the verandah a pair of Nankeen Night-herons with two young ones were feeding at the edge of the water, a group of Yellow-billed Spoonbills were wading along intent on food, with a trilling juvenile, which they ignored, in tow. A Great Egret was perched motionless on a dead tree above the water, and a pair

of Whistling Kites fed young in the nest on a low eucalypt, terrorizing the large noisy flock of Little Corellas nearby. Pied Butcher-birds sang sweetly from the radio mast and in the distance were intriguing flocks of waterbirds, large and small, over the meandering watercourse.

From information gathered by one of the family on the Internet we found that Birrindudu waterhole and flood plain is listed as an important wetland site in the Northern Territory. The report was compiled in 1995, but the last recorded survey took place in 1993. At that time more than 14,000 water birds were estimated to be at the site, and it is the principal waterbird breeding area on the Upper Sturt drainage basin. It is one of two known breeding sites for Glossy Ibis.

Three years ago when the Heytesbury Pastoral Company made the decision to combine these stations (Wallamunga was derelict) the policy of "conserving and restoring" the land was also implemented, with extensive tree planting around the homestead itself, cattle excluded from waterholes by fencing (there are 46 bores on the property for watering the cattle), and vast tracts of land fenced so that cattle can be moved and contained in certain areas to avoid over grazing. As a result, the eucalypts and other vegetation around the waterholes has grown back, and a video made at the time of the takeover shows that the area surrounding the homestead resembled a dust bowl, which makes one appreciate the extent of the transformation by means of good management (plus generous expenditure, of course). The area of 8,870km², with 30,000 head of Brahmin cattle and 150 horses, is run by an average of 17 personnel, including a full time fencer and grader driver.

But I must return to the bird life, and as space is not available for lengthy lists, I will concentrate on a few of the special ones.

Accompanying Sue on her daily rounds of nearby horse and cattle yards we saw Torresian Crows, the inevitable Little Corellas, and flocks of Pratincole feeding nearby. Bustards were common, though the head stockman told us that they were rarely seen three years ago when they first began to rehabilitate the area.

Sauntering along the edge of the watercourse for about two hours with my daughter we observed three types of Ibis - Glossy, Straw-necked and Sacred. Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills were also feeding in the area as well as Pacific Black Ducks and Grey Teal, Black Swans, cormorants, Pacific Heron, a flock of 14 Pelicans, a Little Tern in flight and circling overhead on the updraughts were five Jabiru.

Among the lignum, young eucalypts and various shrubs at the edge of the water were Variegated Wrens, Brown Honeyeaters, Zebra and White-browed Finches, Willie Wagtails, and Yellow-throated Miners.

Further observations by another family member in proximity to the homestead included Fairy Martin, Black-fronted Dotterel, Sacred Kingfisher, Rainbow Bee-eater, Rufous-throated and White Plumed Honeyeaters, a White-winged

Triller, Little and Brown Falcons, Spotted Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Black Kite and a Drongo.

A fourteen mile drive along fence tracks took us to the Wallamunga waterhole where large groups of cormorants, mainly Pied, were scooping up fish as fast as they could swallow. There also were several Darters, two of which were rasping away from opposite sides of the water, apparently alarmed. I crept along to get closer, but the bird on my side flew off. I was standing a few paces from an ancient River Coobah (acacia) and on a flimsy platform of leaves overhanging the water sat a Darter fledgling. My appearance was too much for him, and he plopped directly into the water and disappeared, I waited anxiously, but did not see him surface. However, the parent birds converged on a spot concealed from me by the trees, and I assume he survived.

On another occasion Sue took time off from her office and other multitudinous duties to drive us many kilometres along fence lines and across vast paddocks of Turpentine, Nutwood and grevillea country to boil the billy at the "lily pond", and again at the C.D. bore and waterhole which is the site of some aboriginal burial trees. Two Brolgas were spotted disappearing sedately into the scrub.

Mustering was in full swing, but because the station plane (used for low flying reconnaissance of cattle before stockmen set out to bring them in) was grounded with a damaged propeller, two hired helicopters had arrived to do the job. The pilot of one had kindly agreed to take short flights around the area after his work had finished for the day, and I was happy to climb aboard the small perspex bubble of a vehicle - minus doors. I was told it was a Robinson R. 22. We flew out low over the Bluebush paddock - a vast swamp of 460km² with lignum clumps and the Bluebush on which the cattle graze in the dry season when the water has disappeared. I could scarcely believe my eyes at the countless numbers of Magpie Geese, Plumed Whistling Ducks, Coots, Water Hens, cormorants, Swans and various ducks which I could not hope to identify. I was alarmed at the disturbance we created as some were obviously nesting in the lignum. The pilot got the message and we rose steeply to a more suitable height for the rest of the journey over continuing swamps and lightly forested areas with Sturt Creek not far away, and into a brilliant sunset as we returned to the homestead just at dusk.

After nine days of this wonderful place we returned to Katherine and the lush tropical gardens of Knotts Crossing resort where the wedding guests were already gathering from far and wide

Shirley Parnaby

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club. (Only put *here* this time because I couldn't fit it on the back page! Ed)

Excursion to Lal Lal Reservoir, Sat. 30th Sept.

Margaret Badminton is leading an excursion to look for water birds with the aid of a telescope to the Lal Lal reservoir. If you would like to join her meet at 27 Doveton St for a 9 am start.

Take lunch, snacks, *binoculars*.

(These outings with Margaret are always most enjoyable. Ed.)

Birds at the Golf Links

These are the sightings for the Castlemaine Golf Course over two days, 10/8 and 11/8. The Noisy Friarbird, which has been around for two or three months now, seems to have two immatures with it, and the Black-faced Woodswallows, which are also a query, need confirming. (Debbie, I am sure, would appreciate your help with confirmation of these sightings. Ed.)

There were at least two Singing Honeyeaters, and also Yellow-tufted, Yellow-faced, White-naped, New Holland, White-eared and Brown-headed Honeyeaters. Also Purple-crowned and Musk Lorikeets, a White-necked Heron, Grey-crowned and White-browed Babblers, Yellow Robins, Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo, Red-browed Finches, Silvereyes, 2 Swans, 2 Long-billed Corellas and a White-browed Scrub Wren,

Also, a big water rat about 50 cm long with a white tip to the tail, and brownish in colour, was seen.

Debbie Worland

Wood Ducks On the Wing

Some years ago we set up a duck nesting box some 15 metres from the house and, in recent times we have become proud grand parents of several clutches of ten to twelve ducklings.

Mother duck has again returned. Each morning the drake calls by and she joins him for some exercise and feeding on the local paddocks. When it is time to return, they fly in like Spitfires, darting through the trees at full speed. They approach the nesting box on the wing, he flies straight past while she flies virtually straight into the box without a pause. If you have seen how awkward Wood Ducks are when landing in trees you will appreciate the skill she has developed in order to deceive avian predators.

Recently her peace was disturbed by a gaggle of Galahs who climbed all over the box and poked their heads into the hole. Finally she had had enough and came out of the box with an egg in her beak and flew off, presumably to another of our

boxes. Some minutes later she returned to fetch another egg but, on this occasion, as she flew past me she dropped the egg but flew on.

She must have had second thoughts about this strategy because some ten minutes later she returned with the first egg placed it in the nest and then proceeded to give the Galahs a beating. Our noisy pink feathered friends have not returned and mother duck sits contentedly.

Later, when they have all hatched we hope we will be around to see her brood come tumbling out of the box, floating four metres to the ground.

John Turnbull

Observations

- On Sunday 9/7 Debbie Worland and her family went for a drive around Cairn Curran and saw 3 Black-shouldered Kites, 6 White-fronted Chats, 2 Shining Bronze-cuckoos and 2 Horsfields Bronze-cuckoos, and on the way home saw a White-browed Babbler at the corner of Sandy Creek Road and Mia Mia track.
- Margaret Badminton reported five Crescent Honeyeaters in flowering Ironbark at Vaughan Springs. They were with Eastern Spinebills and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters. Fantailed Cuckoos were also at Vaughan.
- A report of Crescent Honeyeaters at Sailors Falls, south of Daylesford, came from Chris Morris.
- Penny Garnett found Flame Heath (*Astroloma conostephioides*) in flower on Tick Town track in the Smiths Reef area. (This is one of a group of about 9 plants which are the only ones in the Mount Alexander district. The nearest known specimens are at Tarnagulla. Ed.)
- One of the visitors from the Ballarat F.N.C. reported seeing Bush Stone Curlews at Horsham. DNRE was informed and they are looking at the possibility of fencing off the area, but David Baker-Gabb warned that caution needs to be taken, because under some circumstances the area would become dangerously overgrown for the birds, as they need to have both shelter and a good all round view to survive.
- On the U3A walk in the Walmer bush, 23/8/00, a large patch (80 +) Nodding Greenhoods were found, as well as several patches of about a dozen Tall Greenhoods. Hovea is well in flower, and there are still flowers to be found under the Honeypot clumps. Gold-dust and Rough Wattle was just coming into flower, and the first of the Early Nancies were seen. Fantail Cuckoos were calling in several places. Rita Mills
- Maureen Dredge reports with delight that 32 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew over their house in Wesley Hill on August 22. They were also seen at Badgers Keep in Chewton by Margaret Winmill.
- The Powerful Owl at Maldon Cemetery was seen by Maggie Oliver after a careful search, but Rita Mills and Margaret Badminton can only report having heard it calling a few days later.

- Crescent Honeyeaters are still being seen in the district towards the end of August. The ones in the Gardens were heard on the day of the Broom Pull, Maureen Dredge reported that they are still at her place, and Margaret Winmill reports that they are at Badgers Keep where they were calling in an agitated manner when some burning off was taking place a short distance away. Perhaps they are nesting? Olive-backed Orioles have also been seen there.
- Ken Dredge has again seen the Brolgas sitting on eggs at Lake Goldsmith.
- Masked Lapwing chicks are appearing. John Turnbull reported that two families on properties belonging to the Barkers Creek Landcare group each had 4 chicks hatch on Sunday 20/8. One family has been giving the property owners a hard time by not allowing them to get to the door without a chase, and have got the dog under good control, too!
- George Broadway tells of a Kookaburra which has found the young Bluetongue family in his garden. So far it hasn't caught any, but not because of their own diligence!

FROM THE COMMITTEE MEETING

Broom Pull - A good turn-up of FNC members and a small bus load of Tafe environmental studies students from Bendigo cleared a great amount of broom. Some of the tall broom was removed, but much still remains. Some of the small stuff at the south end of the triangle was not removed. The original cleared areas are still sprouting seedlings but at a reduced rate.

☞ It was decided at the meeting that there should be another Pull (and Bursaria seedlings to be planted) on **Friday Sept. 15 from 9 am to 12 noon**. Meet at the east face, north of the caravan park at 9 am. Leave the cars at the corner of Mary St. and Froomes Road. Bring gloves, hat, sunscreen etc., and morning tea.

Angair 2000 Wildflower Art & Craft Show.

Dates Sat. 16 and Sun 17 Sept., 10 am - 5 pm.

There is a large wildflower display, including orchids.

Admission Adults, \$4, Students and pensioners \$2, children under 12 free.

Admission includes bus tours to heath-land areas, guided walks to selected wildflower and bird areas and entry to the Art show

A special feature is "An Evening in the Forest", which is a forest scene with nocturnal birds, gliders, possums and other creatures of the night.

For sale Native plants, art and craft items, cards by local artists, and books on environmental topics.

If you would like further information Phone/Fax 5263 2787, or Phone 5289 6562

☞ *Information about the **Howlong VFNC Campout** will be on the table again. The program sounds a very interesting one.*

☞ *Remember the Native Plant Group's **Bendigo Wildflower show** on Sat. and Sun. Sept. 2 & 3 in the Golden Square Senior Citizens rooms, from 10am - 4pm each day*

**CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, SEPTEMBER 2000
PROGRAMME**

EXCURSIONS General Meetings Are held in the Uniting church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street. Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Wed. Sept. 6. First of the **Spring Wildflower Walks**. Leave 27 Doveton St. at 4 pm, back around 5.30pm. Leader. M. Dredge

Fri. Sept. 8. **Eucalypts**. Speaker is Ern Perkins. UCA hall. 8pm.

Sat Sept. 9. **A tour of some of the Eucalypts of the district**. Leader is E. Perkins.

Sat 9 - Wed 13 Sept. -**Campout at Gluepot** .

Spring Walks Leave 27 Doveton St. at 4 pm return, about 5.30 pm.

Wed. Sept. 13. Kalimna loop track. Leader, Frances Cincotta.

Wed Sept. 20 Barkers Creek. Leader, Natalie de Maccus (Natalie's own property)

Wed Sept. 27 Fryers Ridge. Leader, George Broadway.

Wed Oct. 4 Walmer Bush or Smiths Reef Railway Crossing. Leader, Rita Mills

Sun. Oct. 8. **Castlemaine Box/Ironbark Forest in Spring**. Garfield Wheel to Guildford via Vaughan. Joint excursion. Meet Ballarat FNC members at the Market Car Park at 10.15 am. Take lunch and afternoon tea. Leader is E. Perkins.

Thurs. Oct. 12 - Sun Oct. 15 **VFNCA Campout at Howlong**. Details available at the meeting.

Fri. Oct. 13 **Canada** with George Broadway. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat. Oct. 14. **Spring Wildflowers**

Fri. Nov. 10. Speaker is Rebecca Ramage Mount Alexander Shire **Weeds and Streamsides Officer**. UCA hall, 8pm.

Nov. 11. **Terrick Terrick** All day excursion or overnight camping. Leave from 27 Doveton St. at 9 am. Bring lunch, snacks, etc. plus camping gear etc. of course if you are going to camp overnight. Be aware that there are no facilities other than toilets, and you will need to take water. Mitiamo is 6kms to the south.

Sun. Nov. 19 **Moolort Plains** A joint excursion with Mayborough F.N.C. Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 12.30, or meet at the Brian Dowey Reserve, Cr. Barrinhup Rd. and Midland H'way Carisbrook.

2000 Committee M. Dredge (President) ph 5470 6474 E. Perkins (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, Z. Thomas, B. Maund.

Subscriptions for 2000 -

Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19 Family \$24

Supporting: \$31

The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

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